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SONNETS  
AND LYRICS  
BY  
JAMES A. WHITNEY LL.D.

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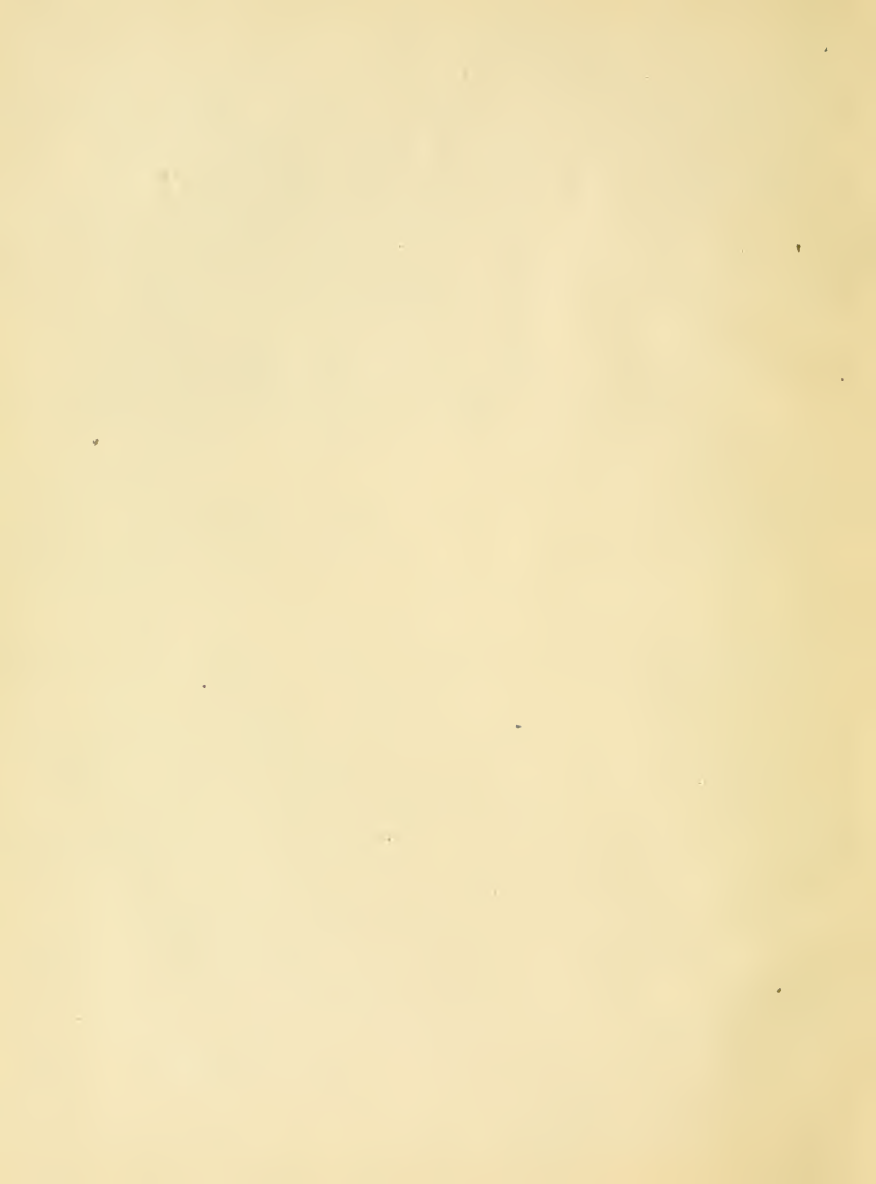
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# SONNETS AND LYRICS.

BY

JAMES A. WHITNEY, LL.D.



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BY

JAMES A. WHITNEY.

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TO THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER,  
A M A Z I A H   W H I T N E Y,

WHO DIED THIRTY YEARS AGO.

A MAN OF KINDLY HEART AND GENTLE WAYS,  
WHO, FROM YOUTH TO AGE,  
FEARED GOD AND KEPT HIS COMMANDMENTS.

THIS VOLUME  
IS REVERENTLY INSCRIBED.



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## SANTA ROSA.

---

Broad oaks and trailing moss and barren sand  
Level and deep and drifted as the snow  
In the far north where yet the spring tide glow  
Had yet no promise. On the sultry strand  
The little ebb and flow of sleepy waves,  
And, from the way apart, a field of graves  
Whereon was sun and silence, and the tomb  
Knew grace of roses budding and in bloom.

And oft, when cold upon the Tappan Zee  
The north wind blows, comes memory to me  
Of deep white sands beneath the sultry flood  
Of noontide sunshine; and gray-bearded trees  
With silence undisturbed by breath of breeze:  
And dream of scentless roses, bloom and bud.



## ESCAMBIA.

---

Were I a dreamer, seeking only rest  
Or sweet cessation from unwelcome toil.  
Within these gentle forests, it were blest  
To lie at ease upon this sun-kissed soil.  
Sharing with nature all her idleness  
And all her bounty of bright summer flowers:  
Her warm airs gently wafted with the stress  
Such as loved lips may breathe in loving hours.

For not in Arcady was softer calm,  
And not on Hermon were light winds more free.  
Nor yet more slender is far Egypt's palm,  
Than are these pines. Nor yet o'er land or sea  
Lies sky more azure. Here from morn to night  
Might dreamer dream with drowsy, slow delight.

## HOURS IN SCOTLAND.

---

### I.

#### STIRLING.

They told me how, in angry winter time  
From out the hills swept storms that marr'd the face  
Of the broad plain with sombre frost and rime,  
And locked the waters in their cold embrace.  
But now from battlements I saw the turn  
And glimmer of still rivers. All the strath  
Wore garniture of blossoms, Bannockburn  
Flowed peaceful from the hills devoid of wrath.

So from the storm of shiver'd axe and spear,  
And clanging claymore straken on the shields,  
So long ago, the half a thousand year,  
On these far lying, low and level fields  
Came forth thy freedom, Scotia. For thy sword,  
In thine own hand, hath made thyself thy lord.

## II.

## CENOTAPH OF THE VIRGIN MARTYRS.

Here, on the gentle air the white flower's scent  
Is sweet and heavy, from the low slope blown:  
And shadows of light branches careless blent  
Fall restlessly on villar and on stone.  
But not for these my thought. Yon marble shows  
In sculptured grace, the tribute of our day  
To the fair maidens who, where Solway flows,  
With hearts untroubled trod the martyr's way.

These were thy heroes, Scotland. And more great  
Were they than were the chieftains who, elate,  
Flung wide their banners on yon castled ridge.  
And I,—for that within these veins of mine  
Flows blood of Bunker Hill and Bothwell Bridge—  
Do stand with head uncovered by their shrine.

III.

HOLYROOD.

Gray walls unroofed, and with the open sky  
    Serene and clear above the grass within.  
And o'er the tombs, wherein no longer lie  
    The ashes of dead kings, grow mosses thin.  
Through the unwindowed arches, soft and sweet  
    Blow summer winds; and lowly, golden crowned  
And rayed with silver petals, at my feet  
    The wild weed-blossoms dot the hallow'd ground.

Like to an old refrain, the moral kenn'd  
    When wild flowers bloom where walls of stone decay,  
And roofs are fallen so the high clouds send  
    Far sailing shadows, soft and silver gray,  
Along the floor of ruined nave and aisle  
    Where on the stones the mosses sleep the while.

## IV.

## VENNACHAR.

I rode along the edge of Vennachar,  
The wild rock-roses nodded by the lake.  
Slow swept the evening breezes. Thrown afar  
The shadows waver'd on the branching brake:  
And on the rock-rose shone the setting sun,  
Unshaded by the light clouds drifting by.  
The wild rose sprang above the herbage dun,  
So, thus it blooms, I said, 'neath ev'ry sky.

And then I thought of many a story told  
To my far childhood, how ayont the sea,  
Lang syne my people dwelt. And cote and fold,  
And lake and rugged hillside, seemed to me  
Like pictures from old songs. So, far and nigh  
Hath Scotland kindred under ev'ry sky.



## V.

## ACHRAY.

Upon the lake the dusk fell dreamily,

    The coppice at its edge was damp and chill.

Careless I flung a wild rose, wide and free

    The scattered petals floated where the hill

Cast its broad shadow on the waters, dark

    And darker growing while the shadow waned

Into the deeper darkness: and the mark

    White lined along the shore, alone remained.

Then Una's legend, to my wayward thought,

    Took newer form as by the marge I stroll'd.

And of the myth my fervid fancy wrought

    A picture fonder than was that of old.

For Benvenue a couchant lion lay,

And like a maid asleep was fair Achray.

## VI.

## KATRINE.

The sunlight on bright waters, then the shade  
Of sudden gathered clouds. Anon, the burst  
In wayward impulse of the rain that made  
A dotted level of the waves that first  
Were joyous in bright motion. Then again  
Lay light on lake and on the mountain brown,  
While purpler still from cooling touch of rain  
The tufted heather from the cliff looked down.

Then, as we passed by Ellen's bosky isle,  
Thou hast beheld, I said, of all thy days  
The pictured reflex. Sun that shone the while  
Thine heart was careless, and whose mellow rays  
Died in the shadows, and the kindly sway  
Of light that came when storm was passed away.

## VII.

## ARKLET.

Loch Arklet hath of fame but little share.

Its narrow banks are broidered with the sedge  
Amid whose slender stalks the silt doth bear

No harvest of sweet blossoms. At its edge  
No bourgeons of green branches droop and sway.

Nor maze or vista opens at its side:  
The bracken cover'd braes are dusk and gray  
And no bright ripples on its breast abide.

But yet beside its banks, a little space,

The traveler lingers, for the tale is told  
That this dull water mirror'd back the face  
Of the fair Helen whom Macgregor bold  
In yonder shealing wooed; that Rob Roy's bride  
Had humble birthplace by yon mountain side.

## VIII.

## OBAN.

A resting place was Oban for a night.

The dark ridge rose behind. The sea before  
Swept rippling westward to the rosy light

That heralded the eve. The clouds remote  
Were level lines of silver; and thereby,

And interwove, the crimson lay afloat  
Upon the deep'ning azure of the sky.

Aye, red and white and blue. In mine own land,  
These hues are of the sunrise and the dawn.

Yea. From my dwelling on its eastern strand,

Where now my children play upon the lawn,  
To fair Pacific coasts where soft and slow

Upon my feet the wave lapped long ago.

## IX.

Yea. Red and white and blue. The wand'rer calls,  
Back to his thought thy colors, where the skies  
Are alien o'er his head; though round him falls  
The voice of kindred speech, nor yet denies  
He fondness for the vales his people knew  
In the old days, ere thou, my native land  
Had raised thy starry banner, white and blue  
And sunrise-crimson on the distant strand.

In the old days. Aye. That the seeding time,  
And these the realms wherein was freedom sown.  
Its harvest whitens in the happier clime  
Of mine own land beyond the western foam.  
Twas thus I ponder'd when the sunset burned:  
And in the morn my face was homeward turned.



## ON THE HACKENSACK MEADOWS.

---

Clear, wild, and free upon the twilight plain  
The prairie fire swept on with lightsome dance.  
Now stooping to the earth, then high again  
Darting toward the sky with tongue and lance:  
With wreaths of serpents coiled in smoky gold,  
And transient stars that blazed and fell away:  
While to the stream its fervid volume rolled  
Where quench'd its flame in scatter'd ashes gray.

Lo. Fitter symbol than an arrow's flight,  
Or grass that grows to fall beneath the scythe—  
Of transitory life is this weird light  
Entwined with cloud so both together writhe.  
And drift and waver, till their glamour dies  
In the low sedge where yon dark river lies.

## DIES IRÆ.

### I.

Day of anger lurid breaking  
On the earth in ashes quaking,  
To its doom at last awaking.

### II.

Through the cloud by lightning rifted  
See afar the Throne uplifted,  
Now shall every thought be sifted.

### III.

Clear and far the trumpet calling  
Stirs the dead from sleep enthralling  
Into consciousness appalling.

## IV.

Coming fearful, sadly, slowly,  
There the proud and there the lowly  
Gather in the Presence holy.

## V.

Where the open volume's story  
Shows, of all the ages hoary,  
All of shame and all of glory;

## VI.

None his record there denying;  
None unto the Judge replying;  
There, through justice, hope is dying.

## VII.

How shall I, to sin assenting,  
Guilty, evil, unrepenting,  
Meet the Vengeance unrelenting,

## VIII.

When the righteous, timid, fearing,  
Scarce are saved Thy presence nearing,  
And Thy words of judgment hearing?

## IX.

Pardon, Father, my offending:  
For my weakness, vigor lending;  
To my doubting, faith extending.

## X.

Hearken, Christ, Thy promise olden  
Clasp I now as anchor golden,  
That I from the wrath be holden.

## XI.

Yea, for me Thy anguish bearing  
Long ago, the thorn crown wearing,  
Wilt Thou leave me now despairing?

## XII.

While my scroll of life is reading  
Aid me with Thy interceding  
While there yet is time for pleading.

## XIII.

Humbled, bent, and bowed, and broken,  
Of Thy love I ask the token  
That Thy word for me be spoken.

## XIV.

While I trust Thy mercy blending  
With the justice that, unending,  
But for Thee would be unbending,—

## XV.

So that while the wicked, flying  
From the wrath, intense, undying,  
Fill the gloom with bitter crying,—



XVI.

Let me, as the sheep are riven  
From the goats to darkness driven,  
Place at Thy right hand be given,

XVII.

Safe from terror, dark, assailing;  
From the doomed ones' woe and wailing;  
At Thy fiery Throne's unveiling.

## THE MONK OF CAPRI.

---

The boats that rocked by Capri's shore  
    Were blest by priest the summer morn;  
But I, a reckless youth, forebore  
    To bow my head, and laughed to scorn  
The prayer low-toned, and benison:  
    Despite the grieving words I heard  
From one I loved and wooed and won  
    Where Capri's almond branches stirred  
Beside the sea. I cried, The voice  
    From sable cowl is not for me,  
The brave and strong; await, rejoice,  
    I yet return to wed with thee.

The fishers of the coral deeps  
    By buoyant winds were borne away

Far to the South, where Afric sleeps  
    Beneath the glow of tropic day.  
Our dredges from the deck we cast  
    Through many a week of weary toil  
Amid the reefs; until at last  
    Our boat was weighted with the spoil.  
Then day by day the joyous sun  
    Our shadows threw upon the foam,  
Until, the northward journey done,  
    We saw the towering cliffs of home;  
And signalled gayly, while a song  
    Broke from my lips in cadence free;  
Oh, maiden, list, the time was long,  
    Yet I return to wed with thee.

Ay, arms as brown as almond husk  
    Shall clasp me as I come, I said,  
And soft eyes glancing in the dusk  
    Are mine to greet ere eve be fled.

They hailed us as we touched the pier  
    With shout and laugh from one and all,  
But not for me were hail and cheer,  
    I of it only this recall:—

The cowl thrown back from steadfast eyes,  
    The low voice toned in sympathy,  
That said, My son, awake, arise,  
    Though death its woe hath sent to thee,  
Our Father's peace be on thy brow;  
    The light that yet on sea or land  
Hath never shone illumines her now:  
    Hearken and pray and understand.

Now, sable cowed, as he before,  
    I bless the boats that sail to sea,  
And send to them from Capri's shore  
    The benison not meant for me.

## THE BANSHEE.

---

Where shone the firelight dying, I, a wee boy was  
lying

Long ago, the while the grandames told in whispers  
low and wise,

How on mountain and in valley, in broad mead and  
forest alley,

The Banshee calls in sorrow before each mortal  
dies;

And how a man wayfaring with full heart joyaunce  
bearing,

May sudden hear the wailing voice and chill with  
horror grow:

For he knows his home forsaken by one whose flight  
is taken

When calls the mournful spirit from the meadow or  
the snow.

And I said, with childish valor, neither fear, nor faint,  
nor pallor

Would come to me should e'er I hear the sad wraith  
crying lone:

I would search until I found it, I would hold until I  
bound it,

And wrenched from out its shadowy lips the secret  
of its moan.

But not in summer's glory, nor yet in winter hoary,  
Though many a year of change and chance to me  
did come and go,

Heard I the Banshee calling, till once, mid snowflakes  
falling,

A voice came wailing, crying, from ayont the drifted  
snow.

I had ridden far, yet royal strode my bonny horse so  
loyal

That with slackened rein I rode him across the  
broken ground,

Till he sprang aside, affrighted, and his eye, with ter-  
ror lighted,

Gleamed on me as I turned him when he started at  
the sound.

For, with me, he heard the wailing, us both with fear  
assailing,

And I scored him with the rowels and I gave him  
stroke and blow

Till, while the snowflakes glistened, he trembling  
stood and listened,

Listened with me to the crying that came from o'er  
the snow.

I thought—I am belated, but for thirty years I've  
waited

Since they told to me the legend of the death  
wraith's warning cry;

And the marvel I'll be sounding if this horse of mine,  
rebounding,

In the gully does not throw me where the broken  
branches lie.

So, from the roadway drifted, through the field where  
deeper sifted

The flakes like feathers floating on the night wind  
blowing slow,

On through the wintry weather, the horse and I to-  
gether

Plunged on to meet the Banshee far wailing in the  
snow.



So, the horse and I, his master, went onward fast and  
faster,

While the snow spun light behind us as from the  
storm the spray,

And the sound seemed far, and nearer, now duller  
and now clearer,

Till he reared upon his haunches with sudden snort  
and neigh,

For standing right before us where the rapid gallop  
bore us,

A slender form was swaying, a wee bit form and  
low,

With the snow wreaths heaped around her, my baby  
girl, I found her:

My little girl, I found her, sadly crying in the  
snow.

I knew not she had wandered and the dying daylight  
squandered,

Chasing for the feathers that were falling from the  
sky,

I her to the saddle lifted and through the snowbank,  
rifted

By the heavy horse's gallop, we bore her, he and I.  
Half an hour—the journey ended—light and shadow  
interblended

Where the fire upon my hearthstone shone clear  
with steady glow,

While the mother watch was keeping; in her low crib  
softly sleeping,

Lay the weary little maiden, the Banshee of the  
snow.

## LILY AND VIOLET.

---

### I.

I saw a Calla lily's stately growth

Swerve in the passing breeze, in garden soil  
Nurtured with gentle care. And nothing loth

To wear its beauty, I with eager toil  
Strode far to grasp it, till its pallid grace

Lay captive in my warm enfolding hand.  
But soon I murmured—I did foolish chase

A phantom charm. For not in all the land  
Blooms there a flower so scentless: drooping lies

The veined, involute leaf. The golden core  
Scatters dead dust: nor evermore shall rise

The waxen stateliness I knew before.  
Vain is my trust, and all my hope is vain—

I flung it by, nor sought for it again.

## II.

Calm and sedate, as one who, dangers past,  
Forever hence takes heed upon his way,  
I sought a forest's shade where sunshine cast  
Through slow stirred branches many a soft ray  
In wav'ring fretwork. There in mellow light,  
Amid the shadowing ferns, a violet grew  
In waxen beauty. And my envious sight  
Noted its slender grace that charmed anew  
With each new glance. So, Fain was I to wear  
This white, sweet bourgeon of the dreamy day.  
With petals trembling as I reached it, fair  
Within my folding hand it cherished lay.  
It still I hold while eve with day is blent;  
The treasured guerdon of a heart content.

## ASPHODELS.

---

In summer time, in sunny France  
Eight hundred years ago  
The sunset shot with dart and lance  
Through branches dense and low,

On courtly knight and lady fair:  
In garden all ablown;  
Its odors sweet upon the air,  
And colors gayly strown.

He gather'd gently from the ground  
Three flowers of varied hue,  
Lo, Here, he said, a sign be found  
Of that which thou shal't do.

Here, purple to its heart, the rose;  
The lily's snowy breast.  
And here the asphodel that grows  
Where holy saints have rest.

So hold them, while in yonder cloud  
The crimson fades to gray;  
And tell me ere the vesper loud  
Hath closed the pleasant day,

Is not the rose more fair, more sweet,  
Than is the lily's bloom,  
Or golden asphodels that meet  
The sunshine on the tomb?

Her soft eyes drooped; afar the sky  
To silver ashes grew;  
While still the twilight wind crept by  
And slowly fell the dew.

No words were hers, to cheer or chide.  
She gave the asphodel,  
And low and broken words replied  
In brief and sad farewell.

The roses drooped, the lilies died  
And snows lay on the plain.  
Anon, There brought the summer tide  
Its garden blooms again.

Of asphodels upon her pall  
With careful hands they laid.  
Gather'd beside the convent wall  
In cold and ashen shade.

In mail he lay, in alien land,  
On field of battle won;  
With asphodels in glaivéd hand  
That grew on Ascalon.

## CYMBALS.

The distant voice of clanging cymbals broke  
    Upon the air; a gypsy's wanton feat  
Of rattling music. Yet its echo woke,  
    To the day-dreamer idling in the heat  
Of fervent noon, the sounds of far off lands  
    And days remote. Of Magyar warrior's tread,—  
Of Moorish maiden's mirth, of voice of bands  
    Rejoicing where Hebraic altars shed  
Of frankincense and myrrh their odors rare.  
    Aye, of the elder time, when Egypt's hosts  
Went forth against the Assyrian land and there  
    Made captive kings; returning with the boasts  
Of high wrought conquerors. And clamor high  
    Of Bacchic dances where no longer fills  
The cup from Libyan vines: the frenzied cry  
    Of Corybantes on the Phrygian hills.  
And joy of Jephthah's daughter ere her moan  
The cymbals silenced in far ages flown.



## THE REVERIE OF ZATHAN THE SADDUCEE.

---

Far on from the fountains of morning to the deep  
flowing rivers of night,

I pause for a moment and ask me: O wherefore the  
warmth and the light?

For the heat of the noontide but wearied, and the  
glow of its splendor denied

To mine eyes the fair view of its glory in the blue  
of the heavens descried.

And wherefore the cool of the twilight, for the herbage  
is drooping and dank,

While the lizards creep out from the covert by the  
spring where the camels have drank;

And I learn not the riddle eternal, why follows the  
night on the day,

So that all that the sunlight hath gilded by the even  
is hidden away.

Thus blinded I toil in the noontide, and wearied I  
wait in the dusk:

Shall I seek some oasis of silence sweet scented  
with roses and musk ?

Shall I listen to voices persuading, that ask me to  
cease in the quest ?

The low soft songs of Dalilah, slow lulling to treach-  
erous rest !

Shall I trust in the joy of the cymbal ? sounds blythe  
as of birds in the air:

The calm of the fast and the vigil, the passionate  
peace of the prayer;

They linger awhile and elude me, they cheer and then  
vanish away,

As the cloud that one moment is crimson, at another  
drifts sodden and gray.

So the journey is vain and the labor, and the yearning  
    is vain and the trust,  
As the flower that springs up by the wayside and  
    withers again to the dust,  
As the harvest that waves to the zephyr, with vigor  
    and beauty alive,  
Sinks into the ground with the earth-worm, and  
    dies that another may thrive.

And naught is the task I accomplish, and naught is  
    the journey I go;  
For even as was the beginning, thus even the ending,  
    I know,  
But a vanishing dream and a troubled, from the fountains  
    that dance in the dawn  
To the sad, sullen waters that ripple where the glint  
    of the sunshine is gone.

## TO A PORTRAIT OF NELL GWYNN.

---

### I.

With winsome smile, as if alive:

She looks from Lely's canvas fair.

Upon her cheeks the roses strive

With lilies on the bosom bare.

'Tis but a dream. Ten score of years

Agone, she passed beyond the vale

Of shadows, whence no form appears

To tell the burden or the tale.

Yet. As I joy to see the sun

Shine placidly on field and lea;

Or sparkle of bright waters run

From forest fount to brimming sea;

So, gladsome, to mine eyes appear

These beauties, dust two hundred year.

II.

Aye. Gladsome smiles she on the wall.

The student lingers as he looks,  
So he, forgetful, may recall

His memories of the history books.  
For these the lips that, near the throne,  
And these the eyes, to prince and peer,  
Spake words of power in dulcet tone,  
Gave glance that boded woe or cheer.

For thus since Eden's apples fell  
Hath of the world been will and way.  
Nor evermore shall stories tell  
Of hearts controlled by gentler sway,  
In evil days, when truth was fled,  
And courage faint, and honor dead.

## III.

Full frail this lady was, and fond  
Of all that hermits feared and spurned.  
Not her's the pages saints have conn'd!  
Nor her's the lessons martyrs learned.  
Not her's the peace that mothers know  
Who call their children to the knee,  
And tell in whispers soft and low  
The legend sweet of Calvary.

'Though rose and lily contrast yet  
On cheek and bosom languid shown—  
'Twas thus the rose and lily met  
Ere yet two hundred years were flown—  
They show unto the thoughts of men  
The beauty of the magdalen.

## IV.

Severe the thought. A shifting cloud  
Gave changing light on face and hair.  
On swelling bust and forehead proud  
And liquid eye, as thought was there.  
Then in the look there seemed a touch  
Of soft reproach, as who would say:  
Ah. Life was sad, and overmuch  
Of warfare mingled with the play.

The little play of laugh and smile  
Atoned by sorrow's secret hour;  
The strife with evil, need, and guile  
Where love doth yield and duty cower.  
So seemed to say, with meaning clear,  
The soft eyes, closed two hundred year.

## TWO ROSES.

---

### I.

There grew twin roses, each on swaying stalk,  
In the pale splendor of an Asian morn,  
When passed the angel Azrael by the walk  
That led from Eden, where of hope forlorn  
Earth's first transgressor went. And one was red,  
Full blown, luxuriant, and the gleaming dew  
Nestled in fragrance in its petals spread.  
And one was budding yet, and white, where through  
The dark green foliage slow the sunbeams crept  
To kiss it coldly. Softly there the twain—  
Passion and pureness—in the morning slept.  
And which will wither when I come again!  
Low whispered Azrael in the dawning day:  
For love may die; and love may live away!



## II.

There clung two roses, when the Asian sun  
Touched the horizon at its western rim,  
And twilight fell. In glowing purple, one  
Dropped withered petals to the shadows dim,  
On the dark earth beneath. And one, like snow,  
With heart unfolded to the azure sky,  
Lay fair and bright while darkness gathered slow,  
And Azrael, whispering softly, drew anigh.  
Which of the twain has withered? Stainless lies  
The calm, white bloom, from dawn to dusk and on  
To farther morn? And then in sober wise,  
He gathered the red petals and was gone.  
The white flower bloomed when shone the farther  
day—  
For love may die; and love may live always.

## MAGNOLIA GRANDIFLORA.

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It bore the blossom of a southern land,  
The leaf that sways where summer ever glows.  
Beside it grew the oak, on either hand  
The buoyant foliage of the maple rose,  
And purple beeches drooped. From wooded hills  
Came winds that had the coolness of the shade  
And freshness of the growing grass that fills  
The dusk recesses of each mountain glade.

A tropic bud on adverse air had thrown  
The odor of its heart, its snowy bloom  
That withered ere to northern foliage known  
Was touch of frost or autumn's softened gloom—  
So One I knew died 'neath earth's alien skies,  
Child of the sunnier land of old called Paradise.













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